

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
c/o Vistronix, Inc.
236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. Suite 110
Washington, DC 20002

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to personally comment on the FCC's ruling on "Video Franchising", FCC NPRM 05-311. First and foremost, I believe sustained local franchising negotiations with both cable and telephone companies must continue. I am currently serving as an AmeriCorps VISTA through the CTC VISTA Project at UMASS/Boston and have the great opportunity to work with several Boston area community media access centers such as Boston Neighborhood Networks (BNN), Cambridge Community Television (CCTV), **Lowell** Telecommunications Corporation (**LTC**), and Somerville Community Access TV in my city of residence. I am connected to these centers not only through my fellow VISTAs working at each site, but also through all the technical and media literacy training I have had the chance to receive at little to no cost. Also as a five year veteran of working with non-profit multimedia for youth programs in the Boston area, I know that these community access centers provide unique opportunities for people to become involved in being more aware and active in their own local media content, exercising our first amendment rights. As an active, informed citizen, I believe that public, educational and government (PEG) access centers are a necessary benefit of franchise.

PEG channels provide the most focused local media programming in my area, such as that from CCTV, produced in-house by a range from community members. I must contend that there is not enough coverage of local public meetings, events, and politics on commercial cable television channels. News affiliates don't provide the same coverage of local government affairs for us to be fully informed citizens (in depth examination of local issues). Because we understand that local democracies work best with widest range of opinions and ideas, the local coverage on PEG channels provides diverse ideas and allows me to be informed about my local government. These channels provide a range of opinions that are not motivated by commercial or marketing interests.

I have witnessed firsthand that the programming of the PEG channels also reflects diversity of voices in my community in ways that commercial media do not. As a resident of Somerville, MA, I share my community with many immigrants from Haiti and Brazil and the only television content on local issues in these languages is on SCAT public access channels. Their content represents under served and unrepresented groups multilingual members of our communities in ways that commercial, English only media do not provide.

PEG access centers allow any resident in my community to show up, get trained, and make their own media content. From my experience as an educator, I know that making media is one of best ways for individual citizens, young or old, to become media literate. Since we live in such a challenging, media saturated environment, PEG access

centers work to help us and others in our communities become active citizens who think critically about the important civil and government issues (education, transportation, healthcare) in ways that other commercial media outlets don't provide. In essence, I support local franchise agreements because they provide funding, channels, and facilities for local citizens to create and access media that is vital to them being informed citizens.

Finally, PEG access is only one of the benefits that communities get out of the franchising process. In addition to supporting PEG access centers as part of the franchise agreement, I also support the continued use of local franchise agreements for these other reasons such as to ensure that communications companies do not engage in “red line” practices that disenfranchise under resourced communities. I also think it’s important to keep the cable and telephone companies accountable for the public interest and to protect against large cable rate hikes.

In response to the complaint that the franchise process “takes too long,” I must contend that government takes time and the cases used as examples in the statement may not be representative of all communities in our country. One generalized agreement federally for franchising will not adequately take into account the unique and varied needs of each individual community. The process of each community negotiating their own franchise agreements allows for the continued assurance that the local public interest is served. The bottom line is that the streets of my community belong to myself and my fellow citizens and the companies interested in providing television service are

obliged to locally ask for (not merely be entitled to) permission to use them.

In conclusion, I hope my comments of concern against the relaxation of franchising agreement regulations are fully included in the FCC's decision process to rule on video franchising, because I am a citizen who values the preservation of local television outlets for public media access and open discourse.

Sincerely,

Danielle Martin

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